

6. SIGHTING OF WHITE-BELLIED HERON *ARDEA INSIGNIS* HUME IN POBITORA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* is a highly endangered species and restricted to undisturbed reed beds and marshes in Eastern Nepal and the Sikkim terai, Bihar (north of the Ganga river), Bhutan *duars* to northeast Assam, East Pakistan, Arakan and North Burma (= Myanmar) (Ali and Ripley 1987). Collar *et al.* (1994) include it in birds to watch.

In Assam, it has been reported from Kaziranga National Park (Barua and Sharma 1999), Jamjing and Bordoloni of Dhemaji district (Choudhury 1990, 1994), Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (Choudhury 1994), Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (Choudhury 1996), Manas National Park (Goutam Narayan, *pers. comm.*).

In Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, located at 26° 12' N to 26° 15' N and 92° 2' E to 92° 5' E, in Morigaon district of Assam, between November 1996 and January 2001, the White-bellied Heron was sighted regularly at Pagladova and Tamulidova marshland. In January 1997, during the Asian mid-winter waterfowl census, we counted 16 White-bellied Herons at Pagladova in an area of 100 ha, 11 at the edge of the marsh and five on bushes beside the wetland. This is the biggest count of White-bellied Heron in Assam to date.

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the flood plains of River Brahmaputra and Kolong. The wetlands are full of

water round the year in different lakes and swamps, with a large extent of riverine grassland and patchy woodland, an ideal habitat for rhino and migratory waterfowl. The wetlands of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary attract nearly 20,000 waterfowl during a good monsoon year. So far, 224 species of birds from 47 families have been recorded in the Sanctuary, which also has the highest concentration of Indian One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). In the last census in 1999, the rhino population was recorded as 74, and is steadily increasing.

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7. BLACK STORK *CICONIA NIGRA* IN AND AROUND GIR FOREST, GUJARAT

The Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* is a winter visitor to northern India, Pakistan, Nepal, east to Myanmar (Ali 1996), and a passage migrant in Gilgit and Kashmir (Ripley 1982). It is known to winter in northeast and eastern Africa, eastern China, and Spain. Some scattered breeding populations are also recorded from Malawi and Namibia to South Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). It is a rare winter visitor in southern India, and has been recorded in Andhra Pradesh (Ali 1996), Karnataka, Periyar lake in Kerala (Daniels 1997), and once in Sri Lanka.

Earlier sightings of the Black Stork in Gir forest have been reported mainly from Madhuvanti reservoir and some odd populations in other reservoirs inside the forest, but a

complete population survey of the species during their migratory period was lacking. The checklist of birds in the biodiversity conservation plan for Gir (Singh and Kamboj 1996) has no mention of Black Stork. Around 80 birds were observed on the bank of Madhuvanti reservoir, including a single photoframe showing 32 birds (Pathak B.J. In: *Vihang*, a Gujarati newsletter, 1999). During end-November 2001, large congregations (31 birds) of Black Stork were observed at Madhuvanti reservoir adjoining the Gir Protected Area (PA). A full-fledged survey was conducted in and around the Gir, to study their status, activity, movement pattern, and roosting behaviour. A total of 65 birds were seen in and around Gir PA; maximum population was seen near reservoirs (Fig. 1).